

## Office of Early Learning: An Overview of Our Approach and Work

**Delaware's Story - Our Young Children.** While we have made progress, we face serious challenges in supporting the learning needs of our infants, toddlers and preschoolers.

- 4 in 10 children ages birth-to-five are from low income families.
- Nearly 7 in 10 five-year-olds are not kindergarten ready. Only 1 in 3 fourth graders are on track for reading and math. Only 1 in 4 who are behind in third grade math and reading will catch up by the tenth grade.
- Our early educators lag in education: only 1 in 5 has a bachelor's degree or higher, and 1 in 4 possess only a high school diploma. On average, our early educators earn just \$19,000 per year—the poverty line for a family of 3.
- Delaware has the lowest (50<sup>th</sup> out of 50) developmental screening rate in the country.

**Brain Science: Getting it right the first time is important. And more cost-effective.** Too much of our public investment in education is misaligned with what we know from neuroscience. It's easier and more effective to influence developing brains than to rewire parts of the circuitry later on.

- 90% of brain development occurs before the age of five, creating 700 neural connections every second. Adult-child interactions 'wire' a baby's brain for cognitive, social and emotional capacities. Early experiences count- positive experiences enhance lifelong positive outcomes. Negative experiences beget negative outcomes.
- By age three, on average, the vocabulary of low-income children is about 500 words compared to the 1100-word vocabulary of children whose parents hold professional jobs. A preschooler's vocabulary strongly correlates with language skills in third grade.

**Early Childhood Development is Economic Development.** Investing wisely in early learning impacts our community's well-being, quality of life and future prosperity. To create an educational system that produces young people ready to compete and succeed in a global economy, we have to start at the beginning. It is an investment worth making.

- Economists estimate a 7-16% return on investments in high quality early education for low-income children, from reduced health care, special education, and social welfare costs, reduced special education expenditures, and increased productivity and tax revenues. This return on investment outpaces the average 6% annual return from the stock market since World War II.

**Educational Outcomes Start Early.** Education is a continuum. It's not a process that begins in kindergarten. Creating links between early learning and K-12 is critical.

- High-quality early learning yields big benefits for low-income children—increasing high school graduation by 30%; doubling college attendance; improving early literacy, language and math skills; and decreasing special education and grade repetition.

**The Delaware Approach.** Delaware has a big vision for our young learners—and our path forward is clear. Supported through state investment, \$50M from the competitive federal Early Learning Challenge, and scores of committed partners, we are stepping on the accelerator. We've come a long way in a short time, but make no mistake about it, the story isn't over. We still have work to do. The goals outlined on the following page will guide our work on behalf of Delaware's youngest learners over the next four years.